

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay Contest – 2003

Third Prize: Supriti Jaya Ghosh, Washington Middle School

“I have a dream, that one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit together at the table of brotherhood.”

Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream, a dream that would make a huge crack in the wall of discrimination, eventually causing it to fall. He was a man working towards social and political equality for blacks and those in poverty.

As a child, Martin Luther King, Jr. went to segregated schools. He studied Theology so he could become a pastor like his father, but King wanted to do more than help souls. He felt that it was his duty to end segregation and poverty. He was influenced by the writings of Henry Thoreau who wrote about nonviolent resistance and by Gandhi, who was peacefully protesting against the British rule in India. Peaceful protest and nonviolent resistance would be the dominating forces behind King's fight for civil rights.

Martin Luther King was a leading activist during the civil rights movements. His first act for racial equality was to lead a boycott of buses in Montgomery, Alabama and other southern cities. The buses were being boycotted because people of color were not allowed to sit where they wanted or they had to give their seats up for the whites. During the times of the boycott, Martin Luther King's house was bombed, but thankfully no one was hurt. Eventually the Supreme Court declared that segregated seating was unconstitutional, allowing everyone to sit wherever they chose.

Martin Luther King started the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957 where he was its president. This group organized community protests. Martin Luther King also led the March on Washington, where he gave his “I have a dream” speech, and organized protests in Birmingham. The protests in Birmingham were met by police officers with attack dogs and high pressure hoses. During these protests, Martin Luther King was arrested. In his whole life, he would be arrested about 30 times. While in a Birmingham jail, he wrote, Letter from a Birmingham Jail.

“So I, along with several members of my staff, am here because I was invited here. I am here because I have organizational ties here. But more basically, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here.”

He also led the Selma Marches, which were marches from Selma to Montgomery. On the first march, the protesters were beaten and tear gassed just outside of Selma, Alabama. This day came to be known as Bloody Sunday. The second march was organized two weeks later. Three thousand people set out, and in the end, 300 people made it the whole way. The Selma Marches were for voting rights in the state of Alabama. This led to the Voting Rights Act in 1965. The Voting Rights Act made it easier for people of color to vote.

For people living in poverty, Martin Luther King helped to make society aware of their needs, but his life was cut short before he was able to complete his job. His last act

was a protest with the garbage collectors of Memphis for better wages. Throughout all these protests, people of all cultures and ages came together and stood up for what they believed was right.

Martin Luther King was also able to write a few books in his lifetime and visit India. His books included stories about protests, sermons and thoughts on life overall. In India, Martin Luther King learned about Satyagraha, the tactic of nonviolent persuasion used by Mohandas Gandhi.

In 1963, one hundred years after the Emancipation Proclamation, people of color were still not equal in the United States. President Kennedy encouraged black movement leaders, but was not able to convince the Congress to pass new laws for equal rights. In 1964, President Johnson was able to pass the Civil Rights Act. This had a great affect on racial equality. The bill forbid discrimination in public places and threatened to cut the supply of funds in areas with segregated schools.

"We hold these truths to be self evident, that all people are created equal." After the Civil Rights Act of 1964, it truly seemed that all people were created equal.

In the time preceding the Civil Rights Act, people of color and people in poverty were thought of as very low and disgusting. Martin Luther King had the concept of "somebodyness" where people of different colors and people in poverty had a sense of dignity. It symbolized the celebration of human value. The importance of human equality is that all people should be able to have a fair chance in life and prejudice and racism are immoral. People should be able to improve their lives, and that was not happening with the demoting of people due to their status or color.

Today all people in America are able to go to widely diverse schools and eat at widely diverse restaurants and be friends with people from different cultures. In the time of Martin Luther King, Jr., everything was segregated from the office buildings to drinking fountains. Life has changed for the better, and today we are able to live in a collaborative world. America wouldn't be America without the input from the different cultures. Everyone in America is originally from a different country or has ancestry from a different country.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was a man with a dream and he acted upon this dream of his. He has now led us to a time, where the wall of discrimination is a pile of rubble and it is against that law for anyone to act prejudiced against someone because of their skin color. We now live in a freer, less prejudiced world, where we can sit and talk to any person of any age or culture that we want to. As Martin Luther King said,

*"Free at last!
Free at Last!
Thank God Almighty,
We are free at last."*

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